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mind, that there could nothing good come from any person of that religion.

The house appeared in bad order, owing either to the neglect or poverty of the people. The priest went through the service of his church, which I did not understand, with every appearance of solemn sincerity. Several of the audience did not belong to the Catholic religion, as I could observe in the course of the service. The priest then preached an excellent sermon, such as I have sometimes heard in our own and other churches; and he afterwards enjoined his Catholic hearers to live a moral, pious, and virtuous course of life, as being most acceptable to God and man. He told them, that though they were placed in a part of the country where religious distinctions were avoided, yet as individuals in a great many places were not so happily situated, his hearers could not be too thankful to God for placing them in so happy a situation. He advised them, in whatever place they happened to be, if they met with persons of a contrary disposition, to use no violent means, though they should meet with insult. He stated that the Christian religion was not brought about by strong means, but by long suffering and patience; that all their rights would come about in the same manner, by the same rule of conduct; and he had no doubt that the warmest Orangemen might yet be their greatest friends, if they behaved themselves prudently: that Orangemen were nothing more than other men, and that there were a great many good men among them, who had joined that party from a general outcry of danger; that it was a class of designing men who had spread and encouraged such dissensions; that the people would yet see their folly and become

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friends. He added, that he thought it highly improper in several bodies of Catholics to form resolutions not to deal with Orangemen; as that measure tended to keep alive the spirit of division which should by every means be avoided; and by pursuing a peaceable line of conduct, he hoped God would bless and enable them to go on in the good work which was now begun.

I confess I was well pleased, and much surprised to hear such liberal sentiments; and I am convinced, were all our clergy to follow the same mode of friendly advice, as the Rev. Mr. B—, in spite of all the exertions of designing men, that internal peace so much wanted would be effected, and the names of Orangemen and Ribbonmen would be heard of no more.

F.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

X. TO H.

H and X. seem likely to supply a TETE-A-TETE for the Belfast Magazine, not indeed of the fashionable kind, but rather a conference between two obscure individuals in a corner, neither regarded by others, nor of any utility to themselves. X. will therefore close the amicable difference with a very few remarks, which H. will, no doubt, receive with his accustomed good nature and amenity: for indeed he appears to be an "amicus omnium horarum," such a one as would, at all times, deliver controversy from personal asperity, and draw, even from the "odium theologicum," its poison and its sting.

It is curious how extremes meet, even in matters of religion. He that sets out from the east, will at length meet, and may shake hands with him, that began to travel from the

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west. The Catholic church, and the Presbyterian church, however they differ in external observances, agree in thinking that Christ is the head of the church; but their distinction lies in this: that the Catholic believes he has left behind him on earth a *living* vicegerent, a spiritual head for the whole congregation of the faithful, and a chief shepherd for the whole *flock*; (an allusion, which, by the bye, has been always cherished by the clerical part of the community, as exalting them in *kind* as well as *degree*, above the people,) while, on the contrary, however numerous Protestant establishments may be, the spirit and principle of Protestantism lead to the belief, that the supreme and ultimate spiritual authority in doctrine and in discipline, rests and ought to rest in the words and works of the author of Christianity; both Catholic and Protestant *alike protesting* against that alliance of church and state, which *both* agree in thinking inconsistent with the independence and integrity of their respective churches.

X. speaks only, and wishes to speak only, of the true principles of Protestantism, which are not, as he thinks, to be found in the practice of Protestant establishments, but in the doctrine of Protestant *Dissenters*, that is, of those who protest against the errors (as they deem them,) of the *Protestant* as well as of the Catholic church. The first reformers, it is now well known, were far from being fully enlightened with regard to the true principles of the reformation, and perhaps still less with the practice which such principles would inculcate. They were so intolerant in words, as, with the Scotch assembly, to call toleration "sinful and ungodly;" they were so intolerant in deeds as to burn Servetus, and many more, who, following the very ex-

ample of free inquiry which had been held out to them, could not *now* consent to bind themselves to that strict uniformity of worship and discipline in which these first reformers were attempting again to encompass and enage the human spirit, after having letting it, for a short time, beat with aspiring wings, the vault of heaven.

But since those days, when the true grounds of Christian liberty were imperfectly understood, when the reformers were more zealous against the abuses of the hostile religion, than regardful of real freedom of conscience in their own, the march of the human mind has been rapidly progressive; in particular the principles of Protestant Dissenters have disowned and deprecated that alliance of the kingdom of Christ ("left only in those written records pure,") with the kingdom of this world, which is expressly disclaimed by Christ himself, and which has constantly supported the grossest corruptions of Christianity. X. speaks as a *lay* Protestant Dissenter, for he would have it always remembered, (and when necessary acted upon,) that there is an evident distinction and discrimination to be made between the *church* and its *ministers*; between the overseers of that church, whether under the denomination of Bishops or Presbyters, and the congregation of the faithful. Both Catholics and Protestant Dissenters agree that the church means the universal assembly of believers, but differ in their notions of church government, equally desirous to maintain its integrity and independence.

All history indeed proves that when the church became incorporated with the establishments of the civil government, this coalition has tended little to the tranquillity of mankind, and still less to civil liberty. The clergy were approved under a form

differing widely from that of the disciples of Christ; they were not long contented to act in a subordinate situation, and to employ their whole time in preaching the doctrines of their religion, in practising its duties, and in going about continually in the discharge of their pastoral and parochial offices.

"Then shall they seek t'avail themselves
of names,
Places, and titles, and with these to join
Secular power; though feigning still to
act
By spiritual, to themselves appropriating
The spirit of God, promis'd alike and
given
To all believers; and from that pretence,
Spiritual laws by carnal power to force
On every conscience.
Whence heavy persecution shall arise
On all who in the worship persevere
Of spirit and truth." MILTON.

Now, in my apprehension, the whole dispute about the Regium Donum hinges upon this point; whether the connexion thus introduced between the state and the Protestant Dissenting church, through the medium of its ministers, does not tend in its consequences to shake the independence of that church, and to weaken the true principles of Protestant dissent, of PROTESTANT DISSENT as understood to be founded on the liberty with which Christ has made us free, not by any means as forming a Presbyterian establishment. The clergy indeed, are, in general, disposed to a Presbyterian Church government. The laity, on the other hand, are, as generally, independent Protestant Dissenters, who consider the right of private judgment, and the resistance to spiritual authority, as the great pillars of the Christian faith, and who, with reason, dread the assimilation and amalgamation of their clergy with the spirit of an ecclesiastical establishment, and their gradual subservience to temporal authority by a money connexion with

the state. Individuals may resist, but I speak of human nature in the mass, of the general effect, not of the singular exceptions.

It is not then to the *mode* of this connexion, but to the *matter*; it is not to the *degree*, but to the *kind* of alliance, *altogether*, to which I object, as totally inconsistent with the genuine doctrines of Protestant Dissent.

It is not by balancing, with the gold scales of my friend H., between the comparative merits of particular plans, the bounty plan of 1800, or the altered plan of 1803, that I can be brought to approve what I think contrary to the principles of Christian liberty, and what I object to, under *all* its modifications, and *the more strongly* on account of these very modifications, or as H. would call them, *meliorations*. A more palatable poison is thus poured into our Dissenting Church. Wherever a public principle is to be beaten down, great care is always taken to render the measure as palatable as possible; and often it may be observed that in those insidious negotiations, what is first advanced, is, purposely, made harsh and unacceptable, that by repeated distillations, and re-distillations, a comparison may be made, how much better it now tastes than it did before, how softened, how sweetened, how innocently exhilarating, "how it flames and dances in its crystal bounds;" yet notwithstanding, I should say, "be wise and do *not* taste," but "shed the luscious liquor on the ground," for poison it was, and poison it still contains.

All the detail of these negotiations made by H., as carried on by agents, or ministers, or committees, these distillations and re-distillations; these terms not to be accepted, and these other terms made acceptable; all the history of this bounty, whe-

ther in its original avowal of secret service money, whether bestowed occasionally, or during pleasure, or distributed in unequal proportions, or disguised as it is at present, under the form of a permanent pension, under all its shapes, it is in *substance* the same, and by its influence, the spirit of this world must advance, while the spirit of religious liberty, which *had been* so progressive, will now retrograde into the silence, the stately silence, and busy inertness of a supplementary establishment.

I then return to say, that the Catholic church and the Protestant Dissenting church are in *principle* equally hostile to the alliance of church and state, but in *practice* the Catholics of Ireland have *acted* according to their internal conviction, and crowned the word with the *deed*. They declare, most distinctly, "that they never can nor will consent to any interference on the part of the crown, or the servants of the crown, in the appointment of their bishops, and that no settlement can be final and satisfactory which has for its basis, or at all involves any innovation or alteration to be made by authority of Parliament in the doctrine or discipline of the Catholic church of Ireland." Anxious for British liberty, religious and civil, they feel themselves bound not only by a pure devotion to the principles of the constitution, (not to be purchased by ecclesiastical humiliations,) but by gratitude to their fellow countrymen of all persuasions, to reject any terms inconsistent with the perfect and free enjoyment of Protestant liberty.

Now, in truth, when X. contemplates this devotion on the part of the Catholics, to the integrity and independence of *their* church, from political influence, and compares with this godly jealousy, and rational distrust, the whole history of the late negotiations for a large increase

of bounty from the crown to the Presbyterian clergy, at the very period when legislative independence was lost, and conducted by the very agents who robbed our country of that independence, he cannot help reviewing the grant of 1803, (disguise it as you will,) as most evidently designed against the moral and political integrity of the Protestant Dissenting interest; in this light, evidently interfering with the religious doctrine, with the laws, and the discipline of their church, influencing, indirectly, the choice of ministers, and directly the candidates of the ministry, and largely encroaching on the rights of the people. It is, in its essence, an *onus* of obligation, laid upon the clerical part of the community, that represses the spirit of free inquiry in general, and will, with a creeping torpor, be apt to spread from matters of political concern to matters of religion. The whole mind will be robbed of its natural electricity; and in this negative state, it will require strong collision with other substances, to regain its primitive energies. I speak of the mass, not of the individuals, bright exceptions to the general effect on sentiment and conduct. My friend H., for example, is unquestionably an *electric per se*. He appears well qualified, to become historiographer to the Synod, in all the business of the Royal bounty, and I hope will give the world a luminous and impartial account of all the steps in this dark and mysterious negotiation.

Felix, qui causas alta caligine mersas,
Pandat, et evolvere tenuissima vincula rerum.

Blest, who the hidden causes dare display,
And on reluctant chaos pour the day;
Through the long chain, transmit electric force,

While each small link is brightened in its course.

Feb. 26th.

X.